

NEWSLETTER

Quarterly Update

News and updates about sage-grouse conservation in Idaho



Project Funding Applications

Applications for 2007 cooperative sage-grouse project funding were due July 2, 2007. The Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee (SAC) received 15 project applications.

The SAC reviewed project applications at their July 17 and 18

meeting in Boise and sent their funding recommendations to the Director of Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Administrator of the Office of Species Conservation in late July.

Award packets will be sent out in August with the goal of having funding available by September.

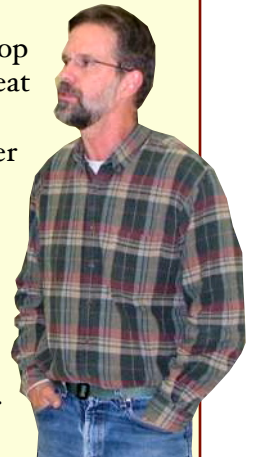
Save the Date!

Please save these dates on your calendar - **Friday, November 2** and **Saturday, November 3, 2007** - for an all Idaho sage-grouse workshop in Sun Valley.

Idaho's first sage-grouse conservation plan was completed in 1997 - 10 years ago. At this workshop we'll ask: What has happened over the last decade? What have the local working groups (LWG) and others accomplished? What have we learned from our successes and failures? How should we move forward?

This workshop will provide a great opportunity for you to meet other local working group members, share what you've learned and have some fun.

- Tom Hemker



LOCAL WORKING GROUP UPDATES

This issue includes a brief update on the status of each of Idaho's local working groups. Desert sage-grouse planning area.

Big Desert The Big Desert LWG is a new group that started in February 2007. The group met June 20 in Blackfoot for a presentation on the status of sage-grouse populations and habitat within the Big

Challis The Challis LWG group recently completed their draft *Challis Sage-grouse Conservation Plan* (<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/grouse/challis/challis.cfm>) and sent the plan out for public

review. The public comment period ended June 22. The group's June meeting included discussion about how to incorporate public comments in the finalized plan. The group also considered project ideas for possible submission for funding. Current LWG conservation projects include: Pahsimeroi Telemetry, Continuation and Expansion of Telemetry Work, and the Clear Hixon Project. The group has also completed data compilation, and the Ryegrass Habitat Project.

East Idaho Uplands The East Idaho Uplands LWG is a new group that started in February 2007. Because the sage-grouse planning area is quite large, the LWG is meeting in two locations every month. The group last met June 20 in Blackfoot and June 21 in Montpelier. Meeting topics included a presentation on the status of sage-grouse populations and habitat within the East Idaho Uplands SG Planning Area.



Greater Curlew Valley The Curlew LWG completed the *Conservation Agreement for Sage-grouse in the Greater Curlew Valley Area* in Southeast Idaho in June of 2004 (http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/grouse/conserv_plan/curlew_workplan.pdf). The group met in May to consider project ideas for potential funding and to hear a presentation from Pete Coates on his nest success research. The group currently has a telemetry project (habitat use areas and chick survival) underway. They have completed the Nalder Fire Restoration and Native Seeding and Wildlife Water Stations projects.

Jarbridge The Jarbridge LWG is nearing completion of their draft plan. Habitat restoration goals in the plan are still being negotiated. The Wet Meadow Pipeline for the Devil Creek Ranch and construction of the Dixie Harrow were completed last month.

North Magic Valley The North Magic Valley LWG began meeting in March 2007. The group agreed to combine East and West Magic Valley into one LWG. At their June meeting the group received presentations on sage-grouse populations and habitat status in the North Magic Valley region.

Owyhee The Owyhee LWG is concerned about the impact of West Nile Virus on sage-grouse in the County. Forty more sage-grouse were radio-collared in Owyhee County this spring to help monitor sage-

grouse survival this summer. Several landowners and agencies are working cooperatively to reseed the Chubby Spain Fire that occurred during the summer of 2006. The development of a new powerline along Highway 51 and a proposed nuclear power plant near Bruneau are also issues of concern.

Shoshone Basin The Shoshone Basin LWG is entering the third year of implementing their plan on the Horse Creek, Magic Common, and Kerr-Lost Creek grazing allotments. A three-year project to map sage-grouse habitat will be completed this summer. This project will help assess how much progress has been made in the past decade to improve sage-grouse habitat and provide a baseline for future progress on several new allotments where the LWG plans to begin work. Ranchers in the LWG, including Charlie Thompson, Jim Baker, and the Pleasant Valley Grazing Association represented by Rob Rogerson received national recognition in the form of the 2006 BLM Rangeland Stewardship Award for their efforts improving rangeland conditions and sage-grouse habitat.

Upper Snake The Upper Snake LWG completed their *Plan for Increasing Sage Grouse Populations* in June 2004 (http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/grouse/conserv_plan/upsnake_workplan.pdf). The group's Executive Committee is currently reviewing the completed plan and developing suggestions for revisions for consideration by the full LWG. Current projects include the Sands Wildlife Habitat Management Area Habitat Improvement, Berry Creek Prescribed Burn, Sorenson Habitat Improvement, Goble Mountain, and Hammond Canyon Project. Previous projects include Inventory and Map of Vegetative Characteristics, Rangeland Drill Seeder, Spencer Spotted Knapweed and Leafy Spurge, and Small Powerline Burial.

Westcentral The Westcentral LWG has completed a draft *Programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances* (CCAA) and is waiting for comments from BLM and the USFWS. Some area ranchers are ready to draft site-specific agreements that would be linked to the programmatic agreement. The group continued telemetry work including trapping and putting transmitters on some new birds this spring.

BLM'S HEALTHY LANDS INITIATIVE

Accelerating Implementation of Sage-grouse Conservation Actions

President Bush's 2008 budget included a request for \$15 million funding for BLM, to implement the Healthy Lands Initiative in six geographic emphasis areas in the western United States.

Funding for BLM by state includes Wyoming (\$4.5 million), New Mexico (\$3.5 million), Utah (\$2.0 million), Oregon/Idaho/Nevada (\$1.9 million-Owyhee Uplands focus), Southern Idaho Snake River Plain (\$1.8 million), and Colorado (\$1.3 million).

The Healthy Lands Initiative (HLI) is an effort to maintain, improve and restore the sagebrush-steppe at the landscape scale. The initiative is intended to help accelerate the implementation of state and local level sage-grouse conservation plans, by leveraging funding and partnerships with landowners, state, local and federal agencies and governments, Tribes, NGOs and others.

Healthy Lands Initiative in Idaho

Idaho contains two HLI areas. One is the tri-state *Oregon-Idaho-Nevada Emphasis Area*, which includes the Owyhee Uplands area in the southwestern part of the state and extends into Nevada and Oregon. In Idaho, this area encompasses most of the Owyhee and Jarbidge sage-grouse planning areas. The other Idaho HLI area is the *Southern Idaho-Snake River Plain Emphasis Area*, which encompasses sage-grouse planning areas in south central and eastern Idaho.

In general, Idaho HLI objectives include:

- Accelerating implementation of the Idaho sage-grouse conservation plan and LWG plans;
- Collaborating with partners to leverage funds;

- Maintaining, restoring or improving sage-grouse inhabited landscapes and associated riparian areas; and
- Restoring sage-grouse habitat connectivity.

Examples of projects tentatively planned for 2008 include juniper management, fuel breaks to slow wildfires, riparian improvement, weed control, restoration of cheatgrass areas, and sagebrush/bitterbrush plantings.

Idaho BLM is in the process of identifying HLI project focus areas to aid in planning and prioritizing future efforts. Interested partners should begin working closely with their local BLM contacts now, to develop collaborative on-the-ground project proposals for fiscal year 2009.

General background information regarding the HLI can be found at: http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/info/newsroom/2007/february/healthy_lands_intiative.html



STRATEGIC FUNDING SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE

The strategic funding subcommittee met with NRCS Director Simms and Bob Bartholomew in early July. Director Simms and Mr. Bartholomew agreed to give priority in funding decisions to sage-grouse projects that are

recommended by the SAC. In fiscal year 2008 they will look at establishing a more formal commitment to prioritizing projects that benefit sage-grouse and their habitats.

Conservation Innovative Grants (CIG) may also be

available for some projects. Under CIG's LWG's would be the lead on the projects - not individual landowners - and a private landowner contribution would not be required.

Stay tuned for more funding updates.

RANGEWIDE STRATEGY

National Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy

In early 2007 the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies completed a rangewide strategy for improving sage-grouse populations and habitats.

The goal of the strategy is "To maintain and enhance populations and distribution of sage-grouse by protecting and improving sagebrush habitats and ecosystems that sustain these populations."

The strategy outlines the critical need to develop the associations among local, state, provincial, tribal, and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individual citizens to accomplish needed conservation. Conservation efforts that are conducted by the states, provinces, tribes, agencies and particularly local working groups form the foundation of the conservation strategy.



The strategy proposes the development and implementation of federal legislation called the North American Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Act (NASECA) to provide the funding and organizational structure needed to sustain a long-term rangewide conservation effort. The full text of the Strategy can be found at: <http://www.wafwa.org>.

NEW NATIONAL BLM DIRECTOR**Idaho Office Of Species Conservation's James Caswell Nominated to Head BLM**

President Bush has nominated Idaho's James Caswell as the next Director of the BLM.

The BLM, which has about 10,800 employees and an annual budget of about \$1.8 billion, manages more land – 258 million surface acres – than any other federal agency. Most of this public land is located in 12 western states, including Alaska.

These public lands make up about 13 percent of the total land surface of the United States and more than 40 percent of all land managed by the federal government. This land includes over half of the existing sage-grouse habitat and 63% of Idaho's sage-grouse habitat.

If confirmed by the Senate, Caswell would assume the BLM director position, which has been vacant since February 2007, when Director Kathleen Clarke left the Department. Jim Hughes has been serving as Acting Director since then.

More about the November All Idaho Sage-grouse Workshop**Why should I go?**

- You'll get to meet other LWGs members from throughout Idaho.
- Share and hear stories of success, techniques and tools that have worked, lessons learned from things that didn't work so well, and things you really wish you'd known.
- Learn about the range of funding opportunities for sage-grouse projects and how to secure funding.
- Have fun!

**Newsletter Notes**

What would you like to hear about in this quarterly newsletter? Do you have suggestions for stories on other information?

Help us make this a better tool by letting us know what you'd like to see included in future issues.

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